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ABSTRACT

Evidence is accumulating that experiences of children within the violent family are fundamental causes of the continuing problem of family and societal violence. To examine attitudes and values as a function of experience with family violence, 114 male undergraduate students completed a questionnaire assessing general demographics, and several standardized scales measuring psychosocial attitudes, including the Self-Esteem Inventory, the Balanced F-Scale, and the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS). Subjects also completed the Family Conflict Tactics Scale which measured family experiences with different styles of conflict resolution. Results indicated a highly significant negative relationship between family total score for physical violence and the AWS; and between high scores for authoritarianism and positive attitudes toward women. In contrast, there was a positive correlation between the AWS and experience as a verbal victim. These findings appear to support the research on battered women that suggests battering men tend to come from physically violent families and that violence against women may be indicative of an underlying set of misogynistic attitudes, rather than simply an example of learned behavior and low impulse control. (KGB)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AS A FUNCTION OF SUBJECT'S EXPERIENCE WITH FAMILY VIOLENCE

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association, San Jose, CA, April 18-21, 1985.

*Attitudes Toward Women As a Function of Subject's Experience with Family Violence

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Evidence is accumulating that experiences of children within the violent family is fundamental cause of the continuing problem of family and societal violence (Straus, 1973, 1980; Gelles, 1973, 1975; Straus et. al., 1981). The literature of child abuse seems to indicate that a violent childhood may reduce adult empathy for the child victim, at least in parents who become abusers (Melnicle & Hurley, 1969; Spinnetta & Rigler, 1972). Likewise, battering husbands often report violent early family experiences (Stahly, 1978, Straus, 1980).

Violence learned in the home has effects beyond the family setting. Studies of individuals incarcerated for violent crimes indicate the overwhelming majority were victims of severe child abuse (Maurer, 1976; McCord, 1979). Such individuals are generally labeled as having sociopathic personality disorders since they exhibit little remorse and no empathy for their victims, a tautology since their behavior is explained by a label derived from their behavior. Battered children who become adjudicated as juvenile delinquents, adult criminals and/or battering parents or spouses are all individuals "caught in the system" and therefore available for study. That these individuals come overwhelming from violent childhoods is apparent: that their violent family experiences effect their attitudes, values and behaviors is equally clear. However, individuals who have been identified as antisocial and adjudicated are a very biased population. Since adjudication is influenced by factors such as race and socioeconomic status, these individuals are not even representative of violent individuals, let alone the general population (Wolfgang, 1958, 1976,;

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Bard, 1974). No study, to date, has examined attitudes and values as a function of experience with family violence in a more general population.

As part of a larger study on the effects of family experience on attitudes toward victims, 114 males subjects, all undergraduate students, completed a questionnaire assessing general demographics, and several standardized scales measuring psychosocial attitudes including the Self Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967), Balanced F-Scale (Atanasiou, 1968), and Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1973). Subjects also complete the Family Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), measuring family experiences with different styles of conflict resolution including use of reason, verbal aggression and physical violence. Conflict tactics between father and mother, between each parent and subject, and between subject and siblings were included. Experiences both as aggressor and victim were reported.

Data was analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlations. The attached tables indicates correlation coefficients for the attitude measures with scores derived from the conflict tactics scale. Table 1 presents the attitude measures of self-esteem (SEST), authoritarianism (FSCL) and attitudes toward women (AWS) as a function of the combined family score for experience with the conflict resolution strategies of verbal agression (CTSVAG), physical aggression (CTSVIO) and reasoning (CTSREA). Table 2 presents the correlation coefficient of the same attitude measures with separate components of the family tactices scale indicating subjects family experience as a victim of verbal aggression (MEVBVIC), a victim of physical aggression (MEVIC) or as the aggressor verbally (MEVBAG) or physically (MEAGG).

The findings are presented in the attached tables. Table 1 indicates a highly significant negative relationship between family total score for physical violence and the Attitude Toward Women Scale, ($R = -.37$, $p < .0001$).

As Table 2 indicates, this negative relationship holds whether the score considered is the individual's experience as a victim or as an aggressor. Table 1 also indicates a highly significant negative relationship ($R = -.35$, $p < .0001$) between high scores for authoritarianism and positive attitudes toward women. In contrast, there is a positive correlation, very significant but of a lesser magnitude, between the Attitude toward Women Scale and experience as a verbal victim ($R = .13$; $p < .01$) (Table 1); the combined family score for verbal aggression, while in a positive direction, does not reach significance ($p < .08$) (Table 2).

The finding that the relationship between experience as a victim of physical violence and as a victim of verbal aggression are in opposite directions vis a vis the Attitude Towards Women Scale is of particular interest since the scores of verbal and physical aggression have been found to be highly correlated (Straus, 1979). Evidently, in regard to judgments about women, the experience of verbal and physical aggression, although correlated, mediate in different directions vis a vis certain attitude development. These findings appear to support the report of studies of battered women that suggest battering men tend to come from physically violent families. Family experience with violence appears to provide not only an aggressive model of male behavior but encourages a set of derogatory beliefs about women in general. Although there was in this data no direct relationship between experience with family violence and authoritarian attitudes as measured by the F-Scale, the attitudes toward women held by high authoritarians appear in this study to be very similar to those held by men coming from violent homes. These findings appear to support the notion that violence against women may be indicative of an underlying set of misogynistic attitudes, rather than simply an example of learned behavior and/or low impulse control.

Table 1

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients of
Attitude Measures and Family Conflict Tactic Scales
Percentage of Variance Explained

		SEST	AWS	FSCL	CTSVAG	CTSREA	CTSVIO
SEST	R		.1573	.0847	(-).2469	.1448	(-).2006
	% R^2	--	2.5%		(-)6.1	2.1%	(-)4.0%
	P		.004	NS	.0001	.008	.0003
AWS	R	.1573		(-).3549	.0950	.0873	(-).3656
	% R^2	2.5%	--	(-)12.6%			(-)13.4%
	P	.004		.0001	NS	NS	.0001
FSCL	R	.0847	(-).3544		(-).0667	.0511	-.0624
	% R^2		(-)12.6%				
	P	NS	.0001		NS	NS	NS
CTSVAG	R	(-).2469	.0950	(-).0667		.0818	.4317
	% R^2	(-)6.1%					18.6%
	P	.0001	NS	NS	--	NS	.0001
CTSREA	R	.1448	.0873	.0511	.0818		(-).2178
	% R^2	2.1%					(-)5.0%
	P	.008	NS	NS	NS		.0001
CTSVIO	R	(-).2006	(-).3656	-.0624	.4317	(-).2177	
	% R^2	(-)4.0%	(-)13.4%		18.6%	(-)5.0%	--
	P	.0003	.0001	NS	.0001	.0001	

SEST - Self-Esteem Inventory

AWS - Attitudes Toward Women Scale

FSCL - F-Scale

CTSVAG - Conflict Tactics Scale, Verbal Aggression

CTSREA - Conflict Tactics Scale, Reasoning

CTSVIO - Conflict Tactics Scale, Violence

Table 2

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients of Components of the Conflict Tactic Scale with Various Attitude Measures

		MEVBAG	MEVBVIC	MEVIC	MEAGG
JWS	R	.01	.01	-.12	-.11
	P	.89	.85	.03	.04
SEST	R	-.14	-.25	-.19	-.14
	P	.01	.00	.00	.01
ATTWMN	R	.07	.13	-.38	-.31
	P	.20	.02	.00	.00
INEX	R	.08	.09	.00	.08
	P	.16	.11	.95	.14
VIOL	R	.06	.06	-.40	-.25
	P	.27	.29	.00	.00
FSCL	R	-.04	-.10	-.09	-.00
	P	.48	.06	.10	.99
VICT	R	.05	.10	.05	.01
	P	.42	.07	.36	.90

First rows contain correlation coefficients
Second rows contain probabilities such that prob> |R| under HO:RHO = 0

Legend of Scale Abbreviations:

MEVBAG - subjects score as verbal aggressor
MEVBVIC - subjects score as victim of verbal aggression
MEVIC - subjects score as victim of violence
MEAGG - subjects score as violent aggressor
JWS - Just World Scale
SEST - Self-esteem Inventory
ATTWMN - Attitude toward Women Scale
INEX - Locus of Control
VIOL - Experience with and attitudes toward Violence Scale
FSCL - California F Scale
VICT - Chance of being a victim

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